RANCH LIFE

In Southwest Texas, and Ranch Death as Well.

A STORY OF PERSECUTION AND MURDER—THE STORY OF A HANDSOME AND UNFORTUNATE BOY.

Buena Ventura Ranch, Crochet County, Texas, December 25.—I was spending Christmas at Dick Harrison's sheep ranch in Southern Texas.

It was a big and beautiful ranch in a beautiful country. Fine open valleys and dales, and cosy sheltered hollows, clothed with rich mesquite grass and the various little weeds that the fancy and fastidious sheep loves, were flanked and buttressed by low, conical, or bumpy, flat-topped, Egyptian looking hills. The plains, too, were only a couple of miles to the north and, and looking from them toward those pyramidal hills, with the everlasting azure sky, and the sunlight lying softly over all the landscape's face, with its teasing loveliness, its majestic serenity and repose, seemed to wear a significance, a smile of inscrutable meaning, like that of Egypt, but lacking the awe, the dread that Egypt inspires.

The house—a large and comfortable one for this almost semi-tropical region of beeves and two or three-roomed huts—was full and running over, and quite a half dozen young fellows were camped in a little hollow close by; the weather was delightful, fairly marrying the silvery aspen; one day followed another, warm, soft, sunlight, the air dry, crisp and bracing, like the bright, sweet best of October weather in the middle States.

The boys had worked hard all day long on the 23d, when we arrived, roping stags, making leases and arranging seats for a grand tournament on Christmas eve; everybody was in high glee, and mutual compliments were passed out by the ranch for the next day's festivities.

When the contestants all rode up and saluted, my eye was at once caught by two figures that came from out a little apart from the general camp to the house.

One was a tall Saxon blonde, six feet two or three inches in height, with his fair skin burned to a dark, ruddy tint, which a pair of fine, honest eyes looked out with startling blueness. His features were of a singularly large and regular mould, with a throat and chin as strong as a bull's, a mouth so heavy yet correct, and a nose so high between the eyes that it gave him a slightly lucific look, like ancient Apollo. His proportions were more fine and just than you would often see in so big a man; he carried his head and shoulders magnificently, and his bearing in the saddle was past criticism.

Beside him rode a boy of about twenty. He was of ordinary size, slightly but strongly built, had a pale, olive face, great black eyes and clustering dark hair. It was a face that somehow appealed to you. Although so full now of life and spirit, it had a suggestion of keen sensitiveness, of hidden capacity for suffering. He was on an unmeaningly fine and spirited black pony; his saddle was of superb and ornate Mexican workmanship, and his big white sombrero, glittering with silver, shaded the splendid eyes. While they passed in front I saw the look settling into those features as though seeking someone, then an electric smile passed over his face. He raised the big hat and touched a hand that lay on the pommel, and I looked up and saw Louie, the pretty seventeen-year-old daughter of the house bending and bowing, and I smiled to myself.

"Who are they?" I asked Mrs. Flint, and she replied as if I had indicated them, "O, David and——" "Goliath," I interrupted.

"No, indeed, David and Jonathan. The tall one is Paul Melton, a young sheep man over on Live Oak, and the boy is his inseparable, a sort of pupil, and a partner, I believe, in a small way."

"Mack used to drink and gamble, I think, and Louie was delighted. Mack got hold of him, straightening him up, and he and his boy lived "over there. They are always together; you never see one without the other."

"Mack? I don't believe I ever knew his other name—carried off the most rings and rode up glowing with victory, to crown Louie queen of love and beauty.

As I looked away from the pretty picture, I saw the blonde giant standing near us in an absolutely indifferent attitude, but with an expression of affectionate pride on his great, frank face. After this we had a general display of horsemanship and a great deal of skylarking.

There is no finer sight, in my mind, than a troop of well-mounted men; there is nothing arouses my enthusiasm and admiration more than fine riding. This is true of a single horseman, and the enthusiasm and enjoyment increase in a geometrical progression with the number of horsemen scanned.

Here there were twelve or fifteen, among the best riders I have ever seen, all mounted on fine and well-trained steeds. It is very easy to talk about picking up handkerchiefs and quarters from the ground, leaping on and off a horse, or hanging on one side of him and firing under his neck, all the time going at full gallop, but there are not so many, even among thoroughgoing cow men, who can perform these feats, as is supposed. However, there were several in the party that could perform all these and many more to admiration. There was no jour or even mediocre work. Young Melton's riding was sensational, romantic; it was like a tower on his strong iron gray, and as he came sweeping down the track the resistless force and power was tremendously impressive. Young Mack, as I established thunderbolt. He tore down upon two fellows who were racing for the gray, jerked them, grasped right and left and went on with a man in each arm while the two were flying away with empty saddles. Everybody applauded loudly; "Mack" scooped the whole race. Hurrah for Mack!" "What M ye leave the horses for Mack?"

But the top's was a very form for the eyes of young love to linger on. The same young outline, the lithe, springing grace, the light sleeness and vigor, and fearlessness! He seemed a glowing incarnation of youth and love and valor. Whether he bent forward or back, twisted sideways or sat erect, he seemed just poised in the saddle; every movement, every attitude charmed and satisfied the eye with its perfection of unfinished grace, like the something ineffable in the slant of a bird's wing, the turn of its glossy head, or the glisten of its quick, bright eye.

The big fellow rode as finely as a man could ride, but there was something more than horsemanship in the boy's riding.

We danced that night to the peculiar and beautiful Mexican music. A harp, a viol and two violins, played by Mexicans who were musicians all the time and shearers in the season, comprised our orchestra. We had the Golondrinas, La Palonia and soft, dreamy waltzes with their singular interwoven piercing sweetness and unexpected and tender accompaniments.

I saw my boy waltzing with Louie. They came past me once and both young faces were flushed and bright with smiles. Presently they passed again, waltzing, and as Mack's face was the shadow that somehow I had felt a presence of from the first. The light was gone from his eyes, the smile and color from his lips. Louie was chattering gaily and laughing up to him, but he looked past her, with a look of fierce pain in the great black eyes, at a young man, a new comer, on the other side of the room.

"Come and look at the ladies," whispered Mrs. Flint. We went out, and in running about, helping, arranging and devising, I forgot the boy for a time.

Presently I slipped out onto a side veranda to cool my heated face a moment in the soft and balmy air. The full moon, the great white Texan moon, rode almost up to mid heaven, pouring its flood of white radiance down through the distinct and crystal air. It was like the sublimation, the apotheosis of daylight; the beauty, lustrous effulgence, without the harsh or unlovely details. Almost simultaneously with my opening the door two men rushed together just in front of me with knives in their hands, and the next instant the towering form of young Melton darted noiselessly onto the porch. He plucked them apart as though they had been two kittens, held the stranger in his right hand, fairly shaking the knife from his grasp, and pushed Mack gently, but hastily, toward me, against me, and through the open door.

"Don't, Mell, don't," said the boy, "one of us gets—"

"Wait with him till I come back," said young Melton, and away he went, carrying the other fellow, like a rat, by the back of the neck.

Mack turned on me a look of agonized desperation, a face drawn and blanched and blackened almost beyond recognition, all the beauty and softness struck out of it, the great lustrous eyes glaring, the fine sensitive feature quivering fiercely.

I slipped my arm through his and we walked silently up and down the silent hallway. I could lean his heavy, gasping breath. I could feel his heart leap and his frame tremble, and was still striving to think of some word to say that might soften the savage threat it must have been that tore him so, when Melton came up and, with a grasp of his hand and a blindly look from his bloodeyes, drew Mack away.

"Hullo! Where's Jake Shackleford," called someone, just as the pair went through the gate.

"O, I sent Lum home with him. He'll get too much and was noisy," I heard Melton reply in a lower key.

After they had left the crowd behind I saw Melton's great arm thrown across the boy's shoulders, and was sure I heard a clinking sob.

An hour later I saw them at supper, and I do not think the others found anything amiss, but to me there was visible a fleeting but frequent shadow on the boy's face, and a pathetic solicitude and concern in the big friend's manner.

The next day, which was Christmas, the men went bear-hunting up a very wild and rocky canyon, which each of us women folk as liked to ride and were fond of sport set off to find a certain wild cut that held forth in a terrible some six or eight miles away across the plains. Mr. Melton was our guide and protector, while Mark was dragged away by the bear hunters.

As we rode home in the late afternoon, full of sentiment and glory, with a big cut skin and a tiny, snarling puff of a kitten as trophies, Mr. Melton and I got far ahead of the others, and this is the story of Mac's trouble, as he told it to me.

"His folks moved out to Esperanza, a couple of miles above my sheep camp, about four years ago. They were New England people. Everybody hated the old man on sight. He was a mean, close-fisted, cold-blooded, snaky sort of a fellow. His wife was a warm-hearted woman, but she hadn't much sense. She ran the house, and him, too, though, when it came to the pinch.

"One day the old man, who was sleeping Mark, was so outrageous and insulting, and called him such vile names, that the boy went and got down a gun to shoot him. His mother screamed, threw her arms around him and held him. I reckon she was with terror, and she took Mark off and told him how she was not his mother. His own mother was a poor, pretty young servant girl she had had in the first years of her marriage, and whose ignorance and youth her husband had wronged. The girl had died and she had raised and loved Mark as her own.

"Now, there was a nice thing for a sixteen-year-old boy to have to bear. In sense she is to say camp the next morning and told me about it. He said about like some poor dumb creature that's been cornered and killed by a bad shot. It must be so, he said, for this fellow, Jake Shackleford, that came out with them and was afterward discharged by his father, had told some other people.

"I was awfully rushed with shearing, and before I knew it the boy was gone. He never was home again, but went up to Esperanza and got a place in a lumber yard.

"He made some awful hot plays, and no wonder. He got drunk and got to running with a gang of pretty tough men. But the old lady always loved him; she wrote to him, and finally went up to Esperanza, bought him an outfit and sent him over to east Texas to start a ranch. He was away two years, and I reckon he came back a month, keeping backs in Esperanza, when he saw Louie Flint, whom Jake Shackleford was crazy in love with. Anybody would love the boy; of course Louie preferred him, so Shackleford, like the low lice he is, went about telling his tale, and the next I heard of Mack he was all broke up and drinking again. "I went up and got him to go down to my ranch with me. He's been with me ever since. I've got a bunch of cattle and he has charge of them. He never drinks, not gambles, nor swears, he's got lots of grit and courage, and he's all life and go; but there's something like a wound which Mell says makes him more to me than any brother could be.

"Can't he ride the prettiest you ever saw? That saddle and members of his are both gemmies he won at roping contests and tournaments. He—"

We were within half a mile of the house, with one or two rises and dips between it and ourselves. Suddenly a shot rang out on the still air, then another. My companion started, leaned me, shot spurs into his horse and launched forward like an avalanche. I followed as fast as I could, but I was fully five minutes behind him as I rode over the last rise.

There, in the hollow was a group of men, standing in the full glory of a pearly sunset, the golden splendor all about and upon him. In the midst built young Mellon beside Mark's motionless form. Mark's head was upon his arm. I rode up and dismounted. The big man was running down his face as he tried to stanch the bleeding of a great wound in the boy's breast.

"O, Mack! O, Mark!" he said.

In a moment later the fatheless eyes unclosed and gazed long and calmly into the west; then turned suddenly toward Mellon with a look in their lustrous depths, which I can never forget.

"Mell, I'm glad," he said after a pause. "I'm better."

The look of yearning love and trust slowly faded from his eyes, then a mist obscured their splendor, he turned his cheek upon Mell's arm and breathed no more.

Four men rode up on steaming horses.

"Whose is he?" said Mellon, rising and struggling with his sobs.

"He turned and fired on us, and we shot him," said Mr. Flint. "Bennett's lodging his body in."—Atlanta Constitution.

Physicians Consent.

MRS. VERONICA C. HOWES, secretary for the Ladies' Health Circle, of New York, has kindly sent word to our representative to use great care in Mrs. Howes' behalf, that the Dr. Kennedy's Medal of Honor, N. Y. H. has permanently cured her of

Kidney Troubles,

Caused by the Bloated, also of Constipation. I was bloated so I could not tie my shoes, or properly with the full measure of my person. Dr. David Kennedy's Favorite Remedy is a marvelous remedy for Microcephalus, Elephantiasis, Bright's Disease, Dropsy, Kidney Troubles, Constipation, Dyspepsia, Liver Complaint, Nervous Prostration, Female Weakness, Pimples, Boils, Blotches, Eruptions, Tetter, Ringworm, Scaly Skin, Scurvy, Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Sciatica, Lumbago, Pain in the Back, Chronic Diarrhœa, Dysentery, Chronic Constipation, Piles, Malaria, Chills and Fever, Nervous Debility, Lost Vitality, Impotency, Sleeplessness, Nervousness, Sick Headache, Female Complaints, Leucorrhœa, Irregularity, Prostration, Pain in the Side, Nervous Headache, Mental Depression, Loss of Memory, Wakefulness, Dizziness